



NEWS RELEASE

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USDA ANNOUNCES THE AVAILABILITY OF MORE THAN \$222 MILLION IN DISASTER ASSISTANCE TO FLORIDA TO RESTORE FARMLAND, FORESTS

Funds are Part of Nearly \$500 Million for Disaster Assistance Nationwide

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., Oct. 26, 2004 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture is making available more than \$222 million to the State of Florida to restore farmland and forests. The funds are part of the \$13 billion hurricane relief package signed by President Bush on Oct. 13, 2004. In addition, \$5 million is being made available for grants for farm worker housing and assistance in the areas affected by the hurricanes.

“President Bush has directed federal agencies to quickly administer aid to those who have suffered losses due to severe weather conditions,” said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman. “Today's announcement marks the first program rollout under disaster legislation that provides more than \$3 billion in relief to farmers, ranchers, farm workers, foresters and agriculture related businesses.”

“The 2004 Atlantic Hurricane Season was one of the most destructive in history, causing widespread damage and devastation to Floridians and their farmlands, ranchlands, watersheds and forest resources,” said Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Mark Rey, who made the announcement at the Capitol here with Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

This assistance is in addition to the announcement in September of more than \$500 million in special disaster relief for Florida producers of citrus, fruits and vegetables and nursery crops. Sign up for the citrus program began Oct. 5 and sign up for the nursery and fruits and vegetable assistance began Oct. 20. Producers should begin receiving payments next week.

Emergency Conservation Program -- \$61 Million

The Farm Service Agency's Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) will provide the State more than \$61 million in financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers rehabilitate their farmland. ECP funds are used to help producers remove debris from farmland, restore fences and conservation structures, provide water for livestock in drought situations and grade and shape farmland damaged by a natural disaster.

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Emergency Watersheds Protection -- \$120 Million

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program will provide Florida more than \$120 million in financial and technical assistance to restore private land threatened by excessive erosion and flooding and for locally sponsored watershed protection projects. EWP funds are used to remove debris, restore eroded streambanks, reseed burned areas, and take related steps to mitigate threats to people and property from impaired watersheds.

Forest Rehabilitation -- \$40 Million

The Forest Service's National Forest System and State and Private Forestry programs will provide the State more than \$40 million for its national, state and private forest resources. The money will be used by the Forest Service and the State to restore the canopy cover of its forests, recreation and administrative sites, roads and bridges as well as endangered species habitat. In addition, because the State now faces an increased risk of wildland fire due to downed trees and other hazardous fuels, the money will be used to support state and volunteer fire resources.

The \$222 million is a part of the nearly \$500 million in disaster funding that Veneman announced yesterday in North Carolina. The funds include \$353 million in conservation restoration funding to farmers, ranchers and communities nationwide, \$113 million to eight southeastern states and Puerto Rico to restore forests damaged by this season's four hurricanes, and the \$5 million in assistance to help repair farm worker housing and provide assistance to farm workers in the affected areas.

During the 2004 Atlantic Hurricane Season, four major hurricanes struck the Caribbean and the Southeast, including Florida, in a two-month period.

More information on ECP, EWP and the Forest Service programs is available at <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov>, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EWP>, <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov> and <http://www.fs.fed.us>.

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